

SARAWAK OPPOSITION PARTIES SAY MONEY BIGGEST CONSTRAINT IN POLLS

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PBDS Baru president Louis Jarau and STAR president Lina Soo (pic) said due to insufficient funds, candidates from the two parties will even have to foot their own election bills. — Picture by Choo Choy May

KUCHING, April 19 — Leaders of two Sarawak-based opposition parties said today the biggest hurdle they expect to face in the coming state polls will be their lack of funds to last the 12-day campaign period from April 25.

Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS Baru) president Louis Jarau and State Reform Party (STAR) president Lina Soo said due to insufficient funds, candidates from the two parties will even have to foot their own election bills. They expressed concern that their party's election machinery would be of no match to Barisan Nasional's (BN) or even that of peninsula-based opposition parties like DAP and PKR.

"We are not lacking in issues to be raised in the elections, but it is the money that is our main problem, putting us in a great disadvantage against the financially-rich major parties, like the BN, DAP and PKR," Jarau told Malay Mail Online today. He said candidates contesting on PBDS Baru's tickets have to come up with their own money to pay the RM5,000 deposit to the Election Commission (EC) and a further RM3,000 to local councils for putting up banners.

"The party cannot afford to help them pay the deposits," he said, adding that the lack of funds is the reason why small parties like PBDS does not field many candidates in the elections. He said only those willing to spend their own money will want to be the party's candidates. "Without money, you cannot move around much, especially if you are contesting in rural areas," Jarau added.

He cited the Baleh and Telang Usan state seats as examples of seats where transportation costs alone could rack up a bill of up to M100,000. Other seats in Sarawak's rural interiors, he added, would require candidates to use engine-powered longboats in order to campaign at the longhouses. For STAR, Soo agreed that the lack of funds could be a setback to her party's campaign.

"We have many issues to raise in this election, but we are constrained by the severe lack of fund at our disposal to finance our candidates and our other political activities during the campaign," she said. Political analyst Associate Professor Dr Jeniri Amir of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) agreed that in the 11th Sarawak polls, like in previous elections, money would be a major factor for parties campaigning for seats. He claimed that in every election, victories are typically decided by how much money a political party has in its coffers.

"In fact, political parties and candidates need lots of money in any elections. You cannot go far without money," said the senior lecturer at the Communications Studies Department. "It is naive to say that power and money do not mix. When you are in power, there will be rich businessmen and contractors lining up to see you, hoping to get some kind of favours from you," he added.